

Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940*. Berkeley: University of California, 1985. \$27.50.

Until recently, most work on advertising could be roughly divided into two groups. One, including Erving Goffmann, Roland Barthes, George Péninou, and Varda Langhol Leymore, and Stuart Ewen has been highly critical of advertising, based primarily on examining popular magazines. The other consists of internal histories of agencies or self-congratulatory books written by insiders like Frank Presbrey. Roland Marchand is more thorough and balanced in his criticism. To research this book, he worked through the files of advertising agencies, particularly J. Walter Thompson (New York), and Lord and Thomas (Chicago), and examined the records of large manufacturers such as General Electric and A.T. & T. He also read the in-house magazines of large agencies, such as Batten, Barton, Durstine, and Osborn, and trade journals such as *Advertising Age*, and *Printer's Ink*. As a result, his book synthesizes a chronological account of the inner workings of the profession with a formal analysis of the advertisements of the interwar years.

Marchand's first four chapters explain how after 1910 agencies set out to erase the "Barnum Image" and recreate themselves as "apostles of modernity." Copy writers evolved from salesmen writing fact-laden arguments from the industry's point of view to "confidants" who coached the reader. "Participatory" copy emphasizing the reader's experience rather than the product itself proved successful in 1920s campaigns by Fleischmann's Yeast, Listerine, and Kotex. Based on such successes "a style derived from the romantic novel and soon institutionalized in the radio soap opera" became the staple of advertising. "It intensified everyday problems and triumphs by tearing them out of humdrum routine, spotlighting them as crucial to immediate life decisions, or fantasizing them within enhanced, luxurious social settings." (24) The largely upper class members of the advertising profession and their agency sub-culture were atypical

of American society. Even as they tried to define the mass audience, they regarded it with a mixture of fascination and disgust. During the later 1920's and early 1930's, as executives experimented with radio, comics, and the printed media, their hopes of uplifting this audience to gentility gradually collapsed. Instead, they found that "the consumer would not accept serious advice about products in any medium without a dream world of frivolity and fantasy to go with it." (115)

In chapters five through eight Marchand looks at advertising synchronically. He examines its strategies of photographic and artistic representation, and analyzes the use of theatrical conventions to create social tableaux with standardized leading actors (usually upper class) and supporting cast (generally workers or shop assistants). These appeared in a number of exemplary "Great Parables" of modern advertising. "The parable of the first impression" commonly used to sell toothpaste, gum, soap, or bathroom fixtures, exploited "a tendency toward self-accusation" in American culture (217). "The parable of civilization redeemed," employed to sell gas heaters, cereals, newspapers, and cigarettes, explored and explained apparent exceptions to "the principle of progress without cost" (227). Such parables were text orientated. Visual clichés were also common, such as "Fantasies of Domain" which symbolized prestige and power by showing a man "commanding a view" from an office window. Some clichés "acquired a liturgical dimension:" beams of light radiated from door hinges or vacuum cleaners, crowds of secular worshippers adored refrigerators, and Listerine or a candy bar made possible poignant moments of family bliss. The Great Depression did not greatly change these parables or visual clichés, but rather transformed their styles. For example, the actors in the 1930's social tableaux often clenched their fists as they fought harder for success, denying that hard times posed any insurmountable obstacles.

Marchand's chapter organization shows his skepticism about advertising as a mirror of society. For him it is a distorting mirror, reflecting the social class of its creators as they adopted a therapeutic approach to the populace, both stirring their anxieties and assuring them that "You can have it all." (363) Ideally, Marchand would have more to say about the origins of the profession in the nineteenth century, but Jackson Lears' articles and forthcoming book will fill this gap. Others will add new "parables" to those he has discovered and find that some techniques he attributes to the interwar years came earlier. But these are quibbles when one considers the massive new research this book makes available in a readable style. *Advertising the American Dream* summarizes and exceeds previous scholarship and will become a standard work. Its nearly 200 illustrations, including color reproductions, make this not only an original but a handsome volume that belongs in every Americanist's library.